

## Christian Coalition Leadership Training

by Julia Lesage

I became interested in studying the Christian right, especially its more moderate electoral sector as represented by the Christian Coalition, because this style of organizing and the attitudes it builds on remind me of the people I knew in the small midwestern town, Dixon, Illinois, where I grew up. In that environment, the professional class of doctors, lawyers, bankers, and teachers mingled everyday with farmers and trades people and we shared a general sense of mutual decorum and respect in our relations with each other. The state of Illinois, like many other states, has long had an urban/rural, Democrat/Republican split. In Dixon, which was generally a Republican town, many people, mostly men, felt free to comment liberally on national "politics." However, they displaced overt expressions of homophobia, sexism, and racism on to the realm of humor, what Freud would call "tendentious" jokes, rather than raise these as specific social issues. My mother was a Democrat, a Jew from New York. She and her small group of Jewish friends always provided for me a refracted optic on this small-town world which I both loved and found constricting. In my adulthood, I also began to see the ways in which Dixon residents would set aside that generally accepted decorum that prohibited raising controversial topics. In particular, in the seventies and eighties, I heard women openly, albeit still politely, disagree with each other about abortion.

In the academic towns or urban environments where I have spent most of my adult life, this world of small town mores remains mostly unacknowledged, even though many of my friends and associates have their origins there. And in the university where I teach, my peers also cling to a now self-destructive ignorance about the Christian right, ignoring how it strategically defunds their workplace, that is, public education, and having little understanding of the conservative right's cultural agenda or its social base. For me, looking at the Christian right is often like looking in a mirror because its participants choose to live within a politically resistant counterculture. Similarly, in my adult life, I have participated in forming a left and feminist counterculture, one which has much in common with the dreams of the utopian socialists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in both the United States and Europe. Like those in right wing, single-issue pressure groups, I know the appeal of an intellectual and social community that places itself apart from mainstream values. For this reason, to find this kind of social fulfillment, I too have participated in running an underground newspaper, helped found a university women's studies program, founded and co-edited Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media for twenty years as an independent "alternative" publication in media studies and media activism, and made low-budget social activist video as part of the independent film and video community. These experiences have made me sympathetic to the notion of an "alternative" or "parallel culture," which offers its participants another, perhaps saner cultural experience than that offered by the dominant culture.

Ironically, this utopian mentality has much in common the countercultural strategies of what Ralph Reed calls "the "leave-us-alone" coalition of pro-lifers, anti-tax groups,

conservative Christians, home schoolers, small businessmen, and gun advocates" [Reed, Active, p. 71], although those people often see my subcultural world as the enemy. Furthermore, while that conservative coalition studies my world in terms of what it sees as a dominant liberal, 'secular humanist' ideology and while it organizes politically to engage in battle against it, my academic and media colleagues usually eschew knowledge or intellectual contact with this diverse, widespread, often very popular, and increasingly powerful conservative cultural force. Instead they conveniently demonize the Christian right -- in much the same way that right wing legislators' attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts or the National Endowment for the Humanities demonize them. [Schapiro]

The people the Christian right is grooming for political office and for lobbying legislators are not the "crazies" that many people associate with the militia movement, Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City bombing--although Christian Coalition members may know and associate with the McVeighs. Rather, in the ranks of these activists are many women who speak courteously and dresses tastefully when they go out in public and educated men who would never throw pig's blood on the staff of an abortion clinic or shout obscenities at the women going in. For the most part, these people become involved in politics out of their evangelist conviction that it is necessary to spread the Word, be a beacon on a hill. Furthermore, the skills Christian Coalition activists learn through studying political organizing tactics and refine through fieldwork pull them into the social process of the community at large. In addition, political experience often helps make them more upwardly mobile economically or more secure professionally. The conservative political leadership training offered by the Christian Coalition also has a special appeal to women who had children young or who have worked mainly in the pink collar ghetto, to retirees who need to find ways to earn a supplemental income or are isolated socially and have free time on their hands, or to working or lower middle class men in transition from one kind of work to another, as happens so often in their careers. It also appeals to professionals and small businessmen, who would gravitate toward the Republican party for its pro-business and anti-regulation stance, and who would benefit from learning how to solidify contacts with the state political apparatus.

Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, says that a 1993 survey found that the average "committed" Christian in their ranks is a forty-year-old woman who went to college, is married with children, with a household income of about \$40,000. [Reed, Active, p. 193] She often works outside the home and lives in the suburbs or exurbs of a major metropolitan area. In other words, the demographics of conservative Christians are often those of baby boomers struggling to maintain a middle-class lifestyle, which requires that both adults in the family work. The focus of such a group as the Christian Coalition on "family values" is a rhetorical device that unifies people around their desire for a folkloric traditionalism, their fears about economic insecurity and their ability to maintain a "home," and their wish that childrearing, especially when both parents have to work, might somehow be more predictable. Both demographics and rhetoric unite the Christian right into a loosely defined subculture which finds its unity around the expression of moral values.

As a subculture, the Christian right must co-exist with the many other subcultures in the United States, some of them antagonistic to each other. In general, subcultures are both constraining and enabling for their participants; although everyone participates in various subcultures, some individuals are more self-consciously "border-crossers" than others. When a subculture that was previously isolated, such as the religious right, chooses to enter electoral politics, as does the Christian Coalition, then certain aspects of the subculture become important to analyze -- in this case, the degree to which religious conservatives cling to their shared world-view, the degree to which their relation to other subcultures shifts or stays the same, and the ways they relate to the dominant culture (which is white, middle class, male, politically conservative in some key institutions like the military, and politically liberal in other important institutions like the press). Some subcultures with which I am familiar include ethnic and religious ones -- Jewish, Catholic, Italian, Black, Latino; political ones -- left/feminist, gay male, cultural lesbian, Black nationalist, ecology activist, New Age; vocationally or demographically based ones -- teens, children, retired people, college students, college teachers in the arts and sciences, independent media makers; and the major economically determined ones -- working, middle, and upper middle class.

Subcultures govern style, both lifestyle and language style. Semantically they perpetuate discourse communities which legislate the range of what can/cannot be said, should/should not be imagined, and is or is not valorized/vilified. Conservative rhetoric indicates the shared values of the religious right subculture. Conservative discourse praises manliness and femininity, the family with a father and mother, parental control over children, private property, the deserving poor, the individual's right to try and fail economically, the free market, private property, lower taxes, less government, military duty, and American patriotism. Similarly, words that indicate consensus about the malevolent forces in society refer to the media, immigrants, public schools, illegitimacy, welfare, "redistributionist" economics, the counterculture (mine, that is), multiculturalism, homosexuality, feminism, government spending (except on the military), and any indication that gender roles might be socially constructed. Not only does the religious right articulate such a moral consensus, it has also developed a media-savvy, politically active, interconnected subculture. This large, diverse network receives little analytic attention from either progressive activists or mainstream media, which the conservative right's political activity always seem to take by surprise. Ralph Reed glowingly describes his own subcultural world in the following terms:

Few in Washington understand what Bill Kristol has called "the parallel universe" in which religious conservatives live, where the radio and television programs reach more people everyday than network newscasts and where pro-family organizations can mobilize the grassroots as effectively as the labor unions and civil rights movements did at their peak. Home-school parents and students, for instance, use personal computers to access lessons and communicate with hundreds of other home schoolers, constituting a ready-made network of hundreds of thousands of cybercitizens. [Reed, Active, p. 177]

The research material which has stimulated this essay is a set of leadership training tapes prepared in 1993 by the Christian Coalition for its political action leadership schools. My analysis of the tapes will describe the specific political advice they contain

as well as explore their wider implications, including the psychology upon which the tapes' speakers rely upon and the place filled by this kind of organizing within the panorama of contemporary U.S. social life. The tapes provide an insight into how the Christian Coalition functions as a religious organization oriented to electoral politics; my analysis will look specifically at the Christian Coalition's self-definition as a "grassroots" organization, its understanding of routine electoral politics in the United States, its economic aspects, and its development of a specific kind of rhetorical strategy. In examining the way this organization functions, I also want to assess the potential effects of their involvement on the participants

### Christian Coalition

In 1986, a year before Pat Robertson decided to run for the 1988 Presidential election, he announced to viewers of the 700 Club nationwide:

If, by September 17, 1987, one year from today, three million registered voters have signed petitions telling me that they will pray, that they will work, that they will give toward my election, then I will run. [Boston, pp. 35-36]

Such a plea did not make him the Republican candidate but resulted in a very successful fundraising campaign. He raised \$10 million by the time he actually entered the race, and in 1988 when he dropped out, Robertson had spent almost all the \$27 million U.S. Campaign Law allows. [Rosenbaum, p. D23] Robertson failed politically in 1988 because he campaigned on the basis of fundamentalist rhetoric and had a seriously faulty understanding of U.S. political process. [Boston, pp. 35-62] Afterward, he returned to his teleministry, which had lost much of its viewership in his absence, and once again managed his CBN network, pulling it out of serious financial straits; he now defines his social role mainly as family broadcasting entrepreneur. However, Robertson did not want to give up his large financial investment in electoral politics, his base of political support, and his newly-gathered political mailing list. At a Bush inaugural dinner in Washington, D.C., Robertson met future protégé, Ralph Reed, former executive director of College Republicans, where he asked Reed to send him a memo on how to organize a grassroots organization. In the next year, 1989, Reed worked to establish this new political vehicle, the Christian Coalition.

On the basis of Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network's and political campaign's mailing lists, Reed began recruiting activists from the Robertson political organization. His goal was to build a grassroots organization that would conduct voter surveys and recruit and train local candidates for office and for precinct work in the Republican party. In establishing the Christian Coalition, Reed refined the strategy of a direct mail campaign developed by Washington, D.C., fundraiser Richard Viguerie in the 1970s and subsequently exploited by Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell. Reed and other conservative strategists had long understood how valuable a political tool direct mail could be for raising money and building a political base, but earlier direct mail campaigns had primarily focused on raising money for national candidates and "hot button" conservative causes since the seventies. These including such esoteric fundraising efforts as Spiro Agnew's defense fund. However, Robertson's summary

defeat in the 1988 primaries and, before that, the Moral Majority's failure to establish a serious electoral presence indicated that direct mail and television alone could not develop the political activism and mass base required for a permanent religious conservative presence in U.S. politics. Furthermore, as Reed puts it:

One of the first things we learned was that the red-hot rhetoric that sizzled in direct mail and on cable television may drive core supporters to their checkbooks but ultimately limits one's effectiveness in the broader society. [Reed, Active, p.119]

Currently, in the unofficial Reed-Robertson partnership, the two men's rhetorical differences reveal their division of labor in the Christian Coalition. Operating with a new, politically sensitive style, Reed describes political issues in terms of social problems and desirable social policy outcomes. He avoids religious reasoning, especially references to verses of scripture. In contrast, Robertson continues a line of millenarian thinking long familiar to his evangelical viewers and readers.

Politically such a rhetorical shift is extremely important. Today as the Christian Coalition has moved into the mainstream, it has taken control of many state Republican Party organizations. Now local Christian Coalition chapters generate their own mailing lists, annotated with a variety of information about potentially sympathetic voters, and these mailing lists are used for electoral and lobbying campaigns, even more than for fundraising for specific causes. With 1,700 chapters established in 1995 in voting districts scattered throughout the United States, the Christian Coalition targets and identifies its constituencies in far more subtle ways than the earlier direct mail solicitations did. Currently, the philosophy behind generating and using the mailing list is to locate those voters who in some ways agree with conservative Christian social philosophy; follow-up surveys refine these points of agreement, which letters sent out to supporters then refer to.

Chapter members often talk face-to-face with prospective conservative voters and maintain personalized, regular contact. And Christian Coalition members' active participation in local churches turns church voter-education groups, church mailing lists, and even the support of local clergy into very powerful tools at the Coalition's disposal, for they function like mailing lists to help set up an initial contact with the desired voting bloc and which make the follow-up face-to-face contact even more effective. The pay-off comes when the voters receive and act on items such as candidate "Report Cards," which they can take into the voting booth; fax alerts about upcoming legislative struggles statewide or nationally; or a letter or phone call about a local controversy, such as the need for a conservative group to build support to remove a text from a school curriculum.

### The Training Tapes:

In the original 1989 memo Reed sent Robertson about how to form a grassroots organization, he laid down a basic principle that has made the Christian Coalition a dynamic institution able to respond to the exigencies of electoral politics and to energize and educate its core members. He insisted that the organization launch and maintain

"an ambitious training program modeled after the leadership schools of Morton Blackwell." [Reed, Active, p. 13] Like Reed, Blackwell had served as the executive director of the College Republican National Committee and later had set up his own conservative Leadership Institute in Virginia. Reed used this connection to develop the Christian Coalition's training program, now carried out in two-day workshops throughout the United States. As the Christian Coalition has grown, these training schools have proven vital to the organization's ongoing practice, educating Coalition members as socially effective activists, especially its 550 county chapter organizers and its even more numerous precinct leaders. In particular, the training schools teach a detailed understanding of political process and develop sophisticated public relations skills. Conducted over a period of a weekend, these Leadership, Citizen Action, or Schoolboard Training Seminars are frequently held in many moderate-sized cities; in spring 1995, for example, the Coalition's internet posting listed upcoming seminars in Anchorage, Alaska; Topeka, Kansas; Fargo, North Dakota; Albany, New York; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Aurora, Illinois; Alexandria, Virginia; Charleston, North Carolina; as well as in Queens, New York. [CC World Wide Web site, January 16, 1996]

In the videotapes made for the Christian Coalition Leadership Schools, one of the speakers is, in fact, Morton Blackwell, and some tapes bear introductory remarks from Pat Robertson. These tapes were filmed in 1992 or 1993, although the leadership manual accompanying these tapes has an earlier 1990 copyright date, indicating that this particular set of tapes comes out of several years' experience on the part of the Coalition's national organizers [Fisher]. At the seminar where most of these tapes were shot, attendees indicate that many are running for local or state office or are working on the staff of an avowedly Christian candidate, suggesting that many are already active politically in the electoral sector. Although the speakers and the audience members do not contrast themselves to other Christian conservatives involved primarily in single-issue organizing campaigns, such as right to life picketing at clinics, most of the tape's presenters insist that electoral politics has to focus on winning votes from the undecided center -- a crucial 15%. Although the tapes' speakers occasionally use religious rhetoric for motivational purposes, the political advice they offer is general enough to be of use to anyone entering electoral politics. And clearly some of the presenters have worked for both Republican and Democratic candidates since they speak from the perspective of high-powered professionals who run public relations or public-opinion survey firms. They offer advice that is more secular than religious.

Christian Coalition members have used this leadership training to great advantage, with particular success in local elections to county commissions, city councils, and school boards. After their initial organizing experiences, Coalition members seek even more ways to share and gain political acumen. As a follow-up to the initial leadership training in a group setting and their subsequent political experience, many Christian Coalition organizers or local political office holders look forward to attending the yearly Christian Coalition National Conventions, where they go to more how-to workshops and, equally important, swap political wisdom among themselves, often about tactical victories achieved at the grassroots level by people new to politics.

The Christian Coalition Leadership training tapes are part of a kind of video production broadly known as "industrial video." Within that broad category, they belong to the genre of "training tapes." In the media industry, such production takes place outside the entertainment industry in the "industrial video" sector, and it comprises the bulk of what professional media makers do. In the United States, for example, the social service and business sectors constantly generate how-to videotapes for specialized training. In terms of distribution, such tapes are often promoted within a "training package." This means that the tapes will be introduced by a live facilitator, perhaps an expert, who introduces the tapes and leads a discussion. The package also includes a training manual to be given to each participant; the attendees annotate the manual with notes from lectures and discussions, perhaps fill out some of the pages as part of the workshop, and refer to it later to refresh their memory. Sometimes participants can check out the training tapes again from a local office. The tapes then reinforce what they learned or they may use the tapes themselves to do new training sessions, creating a chain effect. The training workshop's group setting allows attendees to learn strategies and techniques from the videotaped experts and also from the more experienced presenter. An equally important result of the training session is that participants meet and share experiences with like-minded people in the same line of work with whom they may maintain professional contact for years.

To prepare for this paper, I watched and took careful notes on the verbal content of the thirteen 1993 training tapes, each from 30-45 minutes long. The tapes show mainly talking heads lecturing, with some overhead transparencies projected, and almost no cutaways to show audience members' responses. Cumulatively, the tapes are so full of political savoir faire that I took over 85 pages of notes on them, and they taught me much about electoral processes, grassroots organizing, and rhetorical strategies for public self-presentation, especially for dealing with the press. In a broader sense, the tapes also fascinate me not only for their Realpolitik but for the questions they raise and the contradictions they reveal.

### Grassroots Organizing:

In one tape, How to Organize a Christian County Chapter, Guy Rogers, then director of Christian Coalition chapter organizing, discusses the process of chapter development. "By 1996, he declares, "we want to have identified ten million pro-family voters." To identify those voters and get them to the polls, each Christian Coalition chapter conducts and maintains an up-to-date, precise constituency analysis, household-by-household in its district. Sometimes such a canvass will help political candidates' fundraising; other times it will facilitate mobilizing people to lobby for a specific issues. Of course, it's used most directly to get conservative voters to the polls. Rodgers says chapters should redo their survey every six months because issues and voters' feelings about them change.

Rodgers advises Coalition canvassers who phone households in their voting district initially to ask one or two rather liberal-sounding questions as well as a few questions oriented toward conservative issues. All the caller has to do is get a yes or no answer to discover the Coalition's potential supporters. Then the canvassers phone those potential

conservative voters for a more detailed follow-up interview. Finally, those interviewed get a written response tailored to the phone survey; each letter includes literature targeted specifically to the issues they support -- and not, for example, a pro-life mailing if that would anger them. In this way, contact with the conservative constituency remains nuanced and does not assume that people agree on the same issues. The Christian Coalition has learned more and more to use an appeal to common sense and a broad definition of traditional values to build its base.

Rodgers explains further how to build a local Christian Coalition chapter, speaking with grassroots savvy and citing details and tactics familiar to anyone who has done this kind of work. He presents a timeline for increasing a chapter's numbers from three to eighty committed members over eight weeks. In organizing a chapter, the final step comes when the core group of activists invite 400-500 people to a county-wide organizing meeting, out of which group of contacts Rodgers expects eighty interested people to attend. To locate the potential attendees, Rodgers suggests contacting people from pre-existing anti-pornography lists and church directories. At the organizing meeting, people sign up for positions such as running a finance committee, acting as public-affairs liaisons to churches who will set up social action "mission" committees in each parish (for voter registration, for example), or serving as precinct captains who conduct the strategically important voter-identification surveys. Rodgers adds as an aside that since the canvass director should be attentive to detail and good at follow-up, that task is usually taken by a woman. Very little strategy is improvised in this kind of activism, and even novices can have the confidence to execute their tasks well since the process of doing the survey and the questions to ask are all carefully laid out in the Christian Coalition's "leadership packet."

This strategy for political activism has two immediate effects. First, it provides a "grassroots" networking of like-minded religious conservatives. For the Coalition members involved in canvassing or making local phone calls, the activity creates a sense of being enveloped in a conservative community as the caller become acquainted with names and addresses of sympathetic voters who live nearby. Not only does doing the voter survey institutionally reinforce the activists' shared structure of feelings, but those moral convictions now gain the force of a public voice, if not yet public policy. And the simplicity and certainty that comes with political action give the symbolic structure of "like-mindedness" or "common sense morality" even more coherence. Motivating someone else to act on moral concerns which have long concerned you both means that as a local political organizer, you have taken a step to awaken in others a collective sense that change is possible and reassures both of you that you are acting effectively as agents of that change.

Evangelism charges its adherents to go out into the world to make converts. When evangelists enter social action movements, they demonstrate their commitment to a widely socially-acceptable cause, social reform, which they join to their religious motivation. For many committed Christians, it is probably easier and less embarrassing to collect petitions to place an initiative on the state ballot than it is to hand out religious pamphlets or preach the Bible in a public place. Particularly for women, Christian political activity means that they can move out of the domestic sphere into a movement



with social impact. Sometimes, such women's zeal also reflects their need to escape the conservative mores imposed by their extended family or small community in which they live, mores which have limited the women's social options. From their participation in a national organization and in local organizing across class lines, Christian Coalition activists move into a satisfyingly larger "community."

In this light, Christian Coalition activism can be seen as creating new "conditions of possibility" for its members. That is, it gives people an historical sense that they are participating in a new kind of politically significant, empowering, religious-conservative community. The term "conditions of possibility" comes from Lawrence Grossberg's We Gotta Get Out of this Place, an analysis of the increasing cultural conservatism in the United States over the last two decades. Grossberg's thesis is that any culture at a given historical moment offers its participants possibilities for emotional investment and thus for "making meaning." Grossberg describes contemporary social life, what some have called "the postmodern condition," in terms of a struggle to care about something, organize moments of stable identity, and find the passion needed to enact one's own projects and possibilities. [Grossberg, p. 83] For grassroots political activists, the ritual of participating indeed "organizes moments of stable identity"; when an activist arouses in another the passion to act politically, that social act creates its own gratification and thus ensures the activists' further involvement.

This sense of involvement extends to those who are not political activists. Religious conservatives throughout the United States find that political life is being made available to them in new ways, empowering them with a newfound sense of participating in national issues. Because of the Christian Coalition's success in gaining control of local Republican parties and wielding a large influence nationally, it has given a new kind of self-esteem to the larger body of religious conservatives. For example, Ralph Reed's oft repeated statement, "We just want our place at the table," plays on fundamentalist Christians' perception of themselves as perpetual outsiders, indeed martyrs. Their grassroots political success, however, means the fundamentalist community that had formerly seen itself as an oppressed minority finds pleasure in its sustained local and national political successes. Because of the communal reinforcement many people gain from identifying with these victories, more and more conservatives can then be politically organized into effective local or nationally-targeted, single-issue campaigns, where large, well-organized groups always exert a powerful influence.

At this point, it seems important to address the question of the relation between electoral organizing, "grassroots" politics, and a popular movement. To energize a large group of people, to instill in them a conviction that change is possible, and to get them to act in a collective way is to form a popular movement. Such movements depend on effecting both subjective and objective changes, which potentiate each other. That is, to act, people have to believe that change is possible, and it may be the successes or martyrdom of an early few that galvanize the many to take action in a broad-based movement for social change. Action shapes the imagination, and a renewed sense of possibility in turn shapes future action. Organizing which originates at the base is grassroots organizing, and popular struggles may reinforce or contradict the struggle for official political power, particularly state power.

In this specific instance, although political organization on the precinct level may guarantee its success in local elections, the degree to which the Christian Coalition represents or intends to become a broader, popular movement is not clear. First of all, there are limits to asserting that the Christian Coalition is a grassroots political organization. It has much in common with traditional party organizations, especially at the precinct level, since all electoral campaigns face the same two tasks. Electoral campaigns have to convince the undecided to get out and vote, and they must influence people to vote for their candidate. To do that, in their campaign propaganda they must use a rhetoric that appeals to the swing vote, usually the centrist middle. When the Christian Coalition does this kind of electoral work on the precinct level, it does not seem to function much differently from the way I observed party politics functioning in Chicago, especially in immigrant and working class neighborhoods. Additionally, the Christian Coalition has to increase religious conservatives' turnout from a usual 40% to very high 70-80%. And to do that, the organizing drive has to turn about and use a rhetoric that supports the issues most favored by the religious right.

Earlier I spoke of the empowerment experienced by the like-minded when they have political success. There are also drawbacks to this heady sense of common cause. Not just fundamentalist Christians but any committed, cohesive social group "subcultural, ethnic, minority, trade union, or religious denominational" has a certain inward-looking aspect. When members of a subcultural group become politically active, their like-mindedness often acts to their detriment, particularly in blinding them to the political realities of the coalition building upon which electoral politics rely. Over the last five years, we have seen that religious conservative groups in action often fall into the trap of what presenter Mike Murphy labels in these tapes, "listening to the echo chamber." By that Murphy means that any group of political activists who take their view of social reality mainly from those who agree with them may fail to grasp the political realities of the campaign, especially what's on voters' minds.

Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition leadership understand that in casting a wider electoral net, the organization has to persuade fundamentalists to embrace members of groups toward whom they otherwise might feel antipathy. In particular, because of its pro-family, anti-drug, self-help stance, the Christian Coalition can tailor a special pitch to conservative Blacks, and it has already found many allies among anti-abortion Catholic activists and clergy as well as orthodox and conservative Jews. The question that remains is whether "casting a wider net" will liberalize the religiously-oriented political movement. If it has 40% of the vote and needs 51%, it must develop a language style to communicate to secular voters. In particular, because the mainstream press may eagerly jump in a sensationalistic way from citing the platforms of conservative candidates to references to making references to militia violence and that movement's role in events like the Oklahoma City bombing, the electorally-active Christian right needs to control its public rhetoric to capture the high ground rather than give the press the occasion to describe it as driven by violence-prone crazies.

On another level, if we analyze the Christian Coalition structurally, other factors belie the notion that it is a grassroots organization. There is built-in tension between its top-down organizational style and local members' needs and desires. The nationally-

organized Christian right funds and organizes Christian Coalition chapters because it has a need for large numbers of activists, activists it trains to make more effective. However, in the process, the national leadership may ignore that local issues on a grassroots level are often what coalition members most urgently want to deal with. For example, the Christian Coalition has a national television show on the satellite feed from National Empowerment Television. Frequently Coalition chapters meet to watch and discuss a show, and members are asked to organize to support issues raised at the national level. Obviously national mobilization has a powerful political effect. Yet it is in organizing around local issues closer to home that the Coalition has had most of its political victories, so much so that at the 1995 National Convention, Ralph Reed declared that the Coalition would not try to pick a Presidential candidate, saying that it would concentrate its efforts at the "grassroots," where it was the most effective.

A permanent tension exists between the exigencies of electoral politics and the need to recruit followers who otherwise strive to promote a much narrower conservative cause. For example, Coalition members are now running for local or state office "schoolboards, city councils, state legislatures, planning and zoning commissions, or county commissions; they campaign openly as conservatives, knowing they have an organized base and a national organization, the Christian Coalition, to support them. However, there are many other fundamentalist leaders who do not want to compromise and adopt the broadly popular rhetoric needed to win elections. These people eschew the secular basis of electoral campaigns. Instead they prefer to work on single-issue struggles where they can openly state the problem in terms of their religious and moral beliefs. Currently such activists come into conflict with long-time members of the Republican Party. For example, many conservative religious voters adamantly demand that the Christian Coalition and ultimately the Republican Party require a strong anti-abortion stand from any candidate whom it supports, even though that insistence may cost the Republican Party electoral victory. Influential fundamentalist leaders such as James "Dr." Dobson, head of the large family-oriented publications and media group, Focus on the Family, reinforce such a demand by insisting that any backing down on the abortion issue would betray all the Christians recruited into mainstream political life.

In general, in contrast to working in precinct party politics, when people struggle for a single-issue cause, they experience a particular kind of emotional gratification -- that of socially aroused and discharged passion. For example, in the campaigns for and against gay rights, communities experience all the emotions of social polarization. Not only do people who attend rallies take the occasion to release their own anger but they see that anger socially reinforced. Socially shared anger creates meaning; for the religious right, anger against homosexuality itself becomes its own just cause. However, emotional meaning may not coincide with a rationally effective political strategy. In this case, conservative politicians' very common tactic of using anti-homosexual rhetoric to unite and energize their subculture has also often resulted in a failed, overtly anti-homosexual electoral campaign. Furthermore, extending Grossberg's analysis about historical conditions creating new "conditions of possibility, .. discursive mediations and strategic deployments" [Grossberg, p. 13], it is clear that when the religious conservative leadership strategically deploys anti-homosexual discourse in a subculture already antagonistic to gays, that leadership irresponsibly creates "conditions of possibility" for

violence against homosexuals, even though many people in that subculture would not participate in such violence directly. Looked at from the perspective of its shared, almost universal condemnation of homosexuality, the conservative Christian community perpetuates its common ground and promotes a sense of cohesion in contradictory ways, sometimes around retrograde goals.

Sara Diamond has argued that such contradictions are common within the democratic process of struggling for political power. She asserts that the differences between the goals of the Christian right single-issue causes and the Christian Coalition's electoral strategy affirm the vigor of the Christian right political movement as a whole. This may be true even though religious conservatives variously support many issues that remain a political liability in the larger electoral sphere. Diamond describes one group, Christian Action Network or CAN, which focuses on single issue campaigns, and CAN's relation to the Christian Coalition:

CAN was front and center in last year's [1993's] lobbying to maintain the bans on gay military personnel and on federal funding for poor women's abortions. CAN also took credit for persuading Congress to cut the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts by \$8.6 million. Though CAN opposes subordinating Christian right activism to the interests of the Republican party per se, there is nothing particularly 'extreme' about its tactics. CAN uses direct mailing to mobilize phone calls and letters to Congress members. That CAN pursues a narrow-issue focus and the Christian Coalition hopes to make itself indispensable to the Republican Party is, if anything, a sign of the Christian right's maturity. Social movements are successful to the extent that activists and leaders with divergent strategies can each find a niche. ... Both types of groups [single issue and electoral] are successful because they exploit elements of routine electoral politics: Congress members' response to constituent lobbying and persistent low voter turnout, both of which are advantageous to the highly mobilized evangelical minority. [Diamond, Wrath, pp. 91-92]

Although I generally support Diamond's thesis, I am worried about the degree to which right rhetoric and single-issue campaigns, waged with so much passion, create a climate of opinion which facilitates acts of extreme violence. Although most conservative religious people would denounce the Oklahoma City bombing as a horrific act of terrorism, the religious conservative political umbrella is offered to groups like the militia movement, the NRA, and the "wise-use" land movement. Such groups belong well within what Ralph Reed calls "the leave-us-alone coalition." Conservative political discourse has currently opened up a social space to groups that once had general social opprobrium. In this vein, the trials of Timothy McVeigh and the Montana Freemen may reveal the groups' self-justification through "dominion theology" and thus expose a seamier side of the fringe groups that share much of the ideology of Christian right. [Diamond, Wrath, pp. 47-56] In this tension between the Christian conservative mainstream and its margins, the violence that comes from right-wing fringe groups may yet irrevocably taint mainstream religious-conservative activism, especially the public opinion about it.

Routine Electoral Politics:

It is in the area of "routine electoral politics" that the Christian Coalition leadership training tapes are so brilliant. The speakers include successful politicians and highly paid consultants who do liability analyses for candidates, fundraising, polling, publicity, and public relations. In half-hour sessions, they each summarize lessons from their area of expertise with the kind of succinctness that only comes from years of experience in the field. For example, political consultant Bill Fisher speaks fascinatingly about what might ordinarily be a dry subject, the legislative process of a bill at the federal, state, and local levels. He indicates all the structural points in the formal process where lobbyists can exert pressure, from the drafting of new legislation (get to the bill's Congressional sponsor) to influencing which committee will get the bill. Legislators, he tells his audience, often vote on bills they have not read, and especially at the higher levels, they depend on staff advice. Lobbyists can also influence which legislators get on the bill's conference committee, again at the state level. Fisher recommends that those trying to influence the legislature look for some unrelated bill to which they might get their phrasing added or their positions inserted as amendments, especially if their own issue would go down if presented in a bill of its own.

He and many of the other speakers understand what activism in electoral politics demands: negotiation, compromise, and broadening one's base of support. He describes the kinds of face-to-face interaction a conservative lobbyist, staff person or legislator must become skilled at "being always available to constituents, having good relations with the press, and getting the friendship and respect of key legislative figures, although not necessarily agreement. Roger Byrd, a young Southern businessman who is the youngest state representative elected in Georgia, concurs when he talks about what he's learned in office: "Become allies with your former opponents and cultivate your friends, even making friends of enemies...Bring them into your tent." Byrd and Fisher's advice has the kind of acumen that might attract small business owners and professionals to Coalition activism.

Most of the tapes in this series contain information on conducting an electoral campaign. In particular, they emphasize the importance of advance planning, of studying all aspects of each issue and candidate. Every campaign organization must know how to target its resources. It must spend money wisely and approach the right voters with the right issues. Advance planning indicates when and where to fight, and also how to lead the opponent into shadow boxing around issues that no one ultimately cares about. In this vein, conservative Republicans in Congress successfully pushed the Whitewater investigation. Even though it was inconclusive, the investigation consumed an enormous amount of the Clintons' economic resources and probably wore down their morale. At the same time, it has remained an issue generally unimportant to the public.

Political research includes the systematic study and follow-up that must accompany any phase of shaping public policy. Campaigns, for example, investigate every detail about the people running as well as gather other background data. This information allows speechmakers and publicists to write effective campaign literature since only by sifting through previously gathered information can writers finally put all relevant details into glaring relief and in a way that voters will sympathize with and grasp at once.

To understand the current political situation in a candidate's district, the campaign may use professional canvassing and polling and do a follow up at regular intervals, but such polling is very expensive. A less expensive way to find out about voters' concerns is to conduct in-depth conversations with people in the district from all walks of life. Such conversations must avoid the ego-gratification that comes from listening to those with concurring views. The interviewers or the candidate him/herself should especially try to find out what people like about the other side's candidate and positions and listen with a subtle ear, sensitive to the conversation's shadings and nuances. If a campaign can map voters' feelings, it can identify its target constituencies and effectively make pitch to them; only gradually does a campaign learn what kind of pitches will work with each of the targeted groups. Finally, if the campaign still needs professional public opinion research, at least the organizers have identified the conceptual areas around which pollsters should frame questions.

Christian Coalition researcher on legislators, Terry Cooper, describes how to do opposition research. In some ways Cooper gives a lesson in negative campaigning, and in some ways he eschews that. Following the research, Cooper advises that campaign strategists make a detailed list of contrasts between their candidate and the opponent, and from that set of contrasts, some spoken and some not spoken publicly, the strategists can elaborate a campaign's themes and rationale. Opposition research teaches the key tactical lessons about where one's openings are and will be. Much of the research is done by studying the public record. If the opponent is an incumbent, a lot can be learned from his/her voting history and also from a literature analysis of his/her public persona. Much is written about legislators, for example, in profiles in the Congressional Quarterly, Sunday magazine supplements, city magazines, the liberal press, financial disclosure statements, and speeches--both political speeches delivered by the opposition candidate and those s/he delivered in the legislature.

Unearthing dirty laundry about the other side comes from doing vulnerability analyses, which the researcher must conduct as rigorously about one's own candidate as about the opposition. Cooper says that as a consultant, he has to interrogate his own candidate in a ruthlessly frank way, since if he knows that candidate's potential weakness well in advance, then the campaign strategists can take the initiative in framing the discussion when these weaknesses come up publicly. "There are no secrets in a campaign," Cooper emphasizes. Most important, personal attacks do not provide the most effective or demoralizing attack strategy. Cooper points out that a far more powerful strategy is to undermine the opposing candidate's strengths rather than emphasize his/her weaknesses. Explain how the opposition's strong points are not so great after all and why your strengths are better, Cooper advises. Tell how your side covers more issues. If you demolish the opposition's strength, he says, then they will lose and you will avoid the stigma of negative campaigning. This is the kind of strategy that results in conservatives' denouncing Democrats' social welfare legislation as one more wasteful proposal from "tax-and-spend liberals" or noting that an opposition candidate had a 100% perfect voting record on most issues -- as evaluated by the Sierra Club or the AFL-CIO.

Both Cooper and other presenters emphasize the results that come from detailed research. The more knowledge a campaign has, the more its organizers can act with strategic accuracy. They gain a capacity to predict and a certain amount of control. As they learn their candidate's strengths, they know where to target the campaign's resources. Because they have analyzed the opponent and their own candidate so well, they can predict what the opponent might do or say and where their candidate might be attacked, and how voters might react in each case.

### Embourgeoisment

The Christian Coalition may foster in its activists a kind of embourgeoisment that often accompanies political work. Embourgeoisment refers to the fact that doing political organizing means becoming an administrator and usually moving up in class (it is a phenomenon that often has been studied in terms of trade unions or European labor parties). Especially at the local level, Coalition members will find a close fit between business, politics, and Christian right philosophy and organizing. Working in the Christian Coalition clearly gives members a hand up the ladder in their own local business community. To study one's own socio-economic environment, i.e., the local precinct or district, in such great detail makes a Coalition member quickly divest him/herself of many class prejudices in order to develop strategies based on fact and not myth. Vulnerability studies and voter canvassing use procedures similar to market research. Just studying these Christian Coalition Leadership School tapes and putting them into practice is like getting an MBA in public relations and marketing.

One of the main gratifications from going through a Leadership School, for example, is to discover the systematic nature of the U.S. political process and investigate its mode of operation -- to learn how it works. Understanding that society functions in a systematic way may be a new insight for these activists; indeed, few people would have access to understanding the systematic nature of U.S. politics as laid out in the Christian Coalition's Leadership School tapes. Analyzing the origins of differential understandings of U.S. society, social theorist Robert Coles has published a number of books, the "Children of Crisis" series, which investigate the very different kinds of education that children from different social classes and ethnic groups receive. One of his main conclusions is that children from poor and working class families receive an education that at best just fits them into the system, often at a low-wage job, such as secretary or electronics repair technician, whereas children from families with higher incomes, often in elite suburban or private schools, receive an education that teaches that there is a system. Affluent children learn the systematic nature of social process, including psychology, sociology, and economics. In this way, the Christian Coalition, as well as conservative think tanks, attempt to bring to their constituency an education about social process. Most of these people were previously denied an understanding of the systematic nature of society since they lived largely removed from active participation in the electoral sphere.

In contrast, Christian conservative women now often enter right politics by working from within the domestic sphere, what Concerned Women of America calls kitchen table politics. Many of the same housewives who have heeded the call to serve God as

angel of the hearth are entering the world again through the Christian Coalition, which provides them with a sense of agency in a protected way. That is, it supports (keeps them locked in) fundamentalism's normative view of the family, its fear of public education, and its rejection of state-sponsored social services as intrusions in family life. Such organizing also can be a sublimation for sexual repression or dissatisfaction with domestic boredom. Once housewives become involved in the organization, the Christian Coalition provides field experience which teaches them a wide range of skills. Within a lobbying or electoral campaign, women can learn how, for example, to speak publicly about "uncomfortable" issues--through practice with friends or writing fact sheets and position papers. Furthermore, building relations, being responsive, or making follow up calls and writing notes are things women are already trained in and things a political organization needs.

For other interested organizers who have the time and interest to do this kind of detail work, Christian Coalition work may also provide the kind of training and professionalization that would make them more employable. Many of women involved in activism are returning to the work force or upgrading from low level to white collar jobs. Other activists are often underemployed youth in their twenties. Their work in the Christian Coalition gives them skills that may qualify them for jobs in the state legislature, civil service, or business.

In particular, they learn about face-to-face organizing and selling and about the kind of interpersonal relations cultivated in the business world. For example, engaging in the specific task of fundraising brings a Christian Coalition member into contact with both the bourgeoisie and those of modest means. According to one of the tapes' speakers, David Miner, contact with business people should typically go like this: If I phoned a business person, I'd say, "I'm Julia Lesage. I am running for school board and have a conservative political philosophy. I'd like to come and speak with you for about a half hour about your ideas on the future of the school board." Miner points out that businessmen expect, with *amour propre*, the fundraiser to ask for enough money so as to flatter their ego. They also expect their Coalition visitor to have an accurate or even elevated perception of the businessman's status and success, reputation and worth. And they will remember the person they gave money to, even giving a second time to protect their original investment. When organizers try to raise money from poorer givers, the philosophy behind the fundraising is that such a donation has merit as a profound moral gesture, since working class people can put their money where their heart and their beliefs lie, and they may become energized by this act of political commitment. In this way, the business-aspirant organizer learns to do sales and pitch a line effectively to both the affluent and the poor.

Many aspects of Christian Coalition organizing would also be attractive to a professional such as a lawyer or schoolteacher, or to a small business owner, who could establish face-to-face contact with the elites and the politically influential people in their community or state. These middle-class professionals and business people would learn the skills to be effective lobbyists. Business and political acumen enhance each other. As Bill Fisher says in the tapes, building a relation with legislators not only is crucial for anyone wanting to shape public policy, but the process of doing so quite resembles that



of building a business or establishing a professional reputation. The chapter's committed workers need to build long-term interpersonal relations--with political figures, reporters, clergy, potential donors--which is accomplished only through consistency, promptness, and reliability. In speaking with the committed on the Coalition's mailing list, a good organizer makes them feel a part of the action. And the chapter's pro-business stance will make the organizer familiar to many individual businessmen.

In fact, I wonder if in targeting districts that pick pro-business candidates, such as the suburbs, Coalition activists might adopt more of a philosophy of corporate liberalism than that of libertarianism or Christian political correctness. The role of the martyr and perpetual outsider takes a toll, and the lure to throw it all overboard might not come from secular humanism but from entrepreneurship and an even better life in the suburbs.

Interestingly, even in a grassroots movement, the candidate must act as the main fundraiser and either be rich or cultivate ties with the rich. Wealthy people are the main givers to political campaigns, with donations of over \$500 forming the bulk of the funds raised. As David Miner says, only in September before a November election can the candidate start delivering speeches. Until then s/he has to be locked in a room with only a telephone and made to do full time fundraising for a half a day every day, with no distractions. Campaigning means begging, no matter how embarrassing it is. For example, all the people working on the campaign have to accept their role in demanding that their families and friends make large contributions. Especially those on the finance committee must expect that they, their families, and their friends will spend full time on fundraising and also put in a lot of their own money on the campaign.

The relation of the Christian Coalition to mainstream U.S. corporate capitalism remains as yet untried. The conservative coalition in U.S. politics consists of both social and economic conservatives, whom political leaders like Newt Gingrich and Ralph Reed know they must bring together as a unified force within the Republican Party. For that reason, conservative social legislation is regularly paired with legislation the U.S. bourgeoisie has long fought for, in particular, a reduction in the capital gains tax which primarily affects those who make a living from buying and selling property or securities. Furthermore, ruling class culture is often conservative culture, with high culture already tightly tied to money and corporations. However, the Christian right does not necessarily support contemporary marketing principles, such as 'sex sells.' And on a broader scale, we have yet to see worked out the relation of the Christian right to international, multinational capital, especially in terms of the international policies which protect the stability of multinational corporations and transnational financial markets. Is Christian conservatism compatible with corporate liberalism, Japanese corporate paternalism? I suspect that capitalism is flexible enough to adopt to a renewed puritanism in the United States, but the contradictions between the agendas of the religious right and international capital have not even begun to be explored. Right now, a distance still separates a Rockefeller Republican from a fundamentalist one.

Rhetoric:

Public relations means trying to control the agenda of every political discussion, to define the issues for both one's own and the opponent's sides as these come into the public forum. In the most astute tape in the Christian Coalition's Leadership School Series, Rebecca Hagelin, media director for some key right organizations, teaches political organizers how to frame public discussions. Hagelin insists that each chapter develop a public relations/media plan which articulates as detailed a strategy as the chapter's political organizing plan. The public relations plan has to evaluate personnel, financial resources, and time lines with the same probity as the chapter's electoral strategy. For example, Hagelin insists that each group pick a public relations director and a press spokesperson. The press automatically turns to the State Director of an organization such as the Christian Coalition, but that person may not be sufficiently verbally adept, well rehearsed, or available to meet with the press on demand. Decisions about media representation, Hagelin insists, should be made by the group, not just by the chairperson since the person who meets the press has special responsibilities to prepare herself for those events.

Hagelin's advice to those selected to be spokespeople for the Christian Coalition matches the organization's overall strategy vis-a-vis public discourse, so it is worth noting her advice in detail. This strategy is partially based on advertising principles--including catchy phrases loaded with emotional connotations, an avoidance of analysis, and an assumption of "moral unity" among the listeners. In fact, the strategy calculatedly shapes the issues around which morality should/will be discussed publicly. First of all, as Hagelin instructs, a Coalition chapter or lobbying group must plan ahead what issues they wish to discuss publicly. Then, still working well in advance of a political move, they should write press releases and rehearse spokespeople in the best phrasing of these issues.

Hagelin teaches a tactic that I pass on regularly to media production students, that is, how to be savvy in front of the camera if they themselves are interviewed. Any press or newspaper interviewee should make only three to five major points -- Hagelin calls these the Coalition's "nuggets of truth." The reason for doing so is to guarantee that the edited story will indeed show the interviewee making one her main points; she knows never to offer a recorded aside which the reporter or news editor might use instead. For that reason, people experienced in speaking to the press or doing talk shows learn to make a few points, and only those points, over and over, no matter what other arguments reporters or opponents raise.

If this advice presents the interview as performance and offers tips on how to avoid stage fright or politically disadvantageous statements, Hagelin also knows the value of research for speech making, even when that speech making seems to be spontaneous. Like other speakers in the series, she insists that Coalition organizers, especially the chapter or campaign's public relations committee, know in advance the issues that will come up; they should research these, especially the ones they need to refute. Not only should the group gather facts to back up their points, but even more important, says Hagelin, they should brainstorm to learn how to phrase the issues in a catchy and quotable way.

In terms of propaganda, this aptitude, cultivated so carefully through extensive preplanning, has proven to be the Christian Coalition's genius, turning a moral conviction into a well-turned phrase that seems to sum up rational social-policy agenda. When Hagelin gives an example of this process, she points to what must be a common occurrence on the right: a spokesperson often feels uncomfortable refuting the argument that a woman or girl needs access to abortion in a case of incest. To surmount this discomfort, Hagelin suggests that the spokesperson meet with friends to plan answers that make her feel comfortable; as a result of practicing, she will learn not to shy away from difficult questions but become eager to take them on as she defends the legitimacy of her group's political agenda. This is assertiveness training taken to a new level. It represents the kind of empowerment that allows women active in the Christian Coalition able to make a strong impression in the business world and potential rise in social position, as I discussed previously. Hagelin's way of training public spokespeople makes them feel like experts, confident to take on most issues, since they have studied the controversial "hotpoints" and prepared responses in advance.

Because verbal phrasing shapes voters' " and reporters' " attitudes, Hagelin indicates that the organization's public relations wing must do the following:

Write catchy phrases that are well thought-out and designed to leave an image in people's minds. Learn to make a direct and concise statement about any issue so that you can come up with language that reflects what you want to say. Refuse to use the opposition's buzz or keywords and try always to place them on defensive. For example, say pro-life not anti-abortion, since you believe in an intrinsic value to human life, from the unborn to the elderly and sick. Also say homosexual special privileges, not gay rights, since more than equal rights, homosexuals are after a new set of privileges designed to further their life style. Say traditional, not old fashioned values; you believe in the timeless values of family, life, and liberty, but not necessarily in conventional actions in the home. Do exercises to sharpen your language: Write down opposition's buzz words and then brainstorm collectively with others to find replacements. Write down difficult statements on any given issue and again brainstorm with someone to figure out your response. [paraphrased from the tape].

Beyond its efficacy for grooming spokespersons to talk to the press, such advice reveals two aspects of Christian Coalition strategy " its relation to voters and its struggle to shape public discourse at large in the United States. The kind of language used in these "catchy phrases" assumes that people vote out of emotion and the campaign's resonance with their beliefs, and that support for a given political move can be marshaled more from appealing to sentiments of dissatisfaction than from presenting the details and consequences of a specific legislation political issue. In particular, the Christian Coalition, which seems to have studied both market research and left organizing tactics, differs from the left social movements of the sixties and seventies in that is consistently eschews educating the public about social structures.

Market research perceives its targets as sheep-like, acting in predictable response to certain stimuli. In its relation to the public, the Christian right also sees the public at large as somewhat the same and seeks to make it react predictably to certain well-

thought-out verbal stimuli. Thus the Christian Coalition develops press strategies like those outlined above. In addition, it makes huge financial and logistical investments in its major electoral strategy "printing and distributing millions of voter 'score cards.'" These state in one or two highly selective, connotatively slanted sentences a 'summary' of the candidates' positions and records. It does likewise for the initiatives and referenda on the ballot, noting in a terse conclusion which issues the Christian Coalition supports and which it opposes. Information is parceled out to voters in small doses, and any position that was supported previously can always reverse itself -- which, for example, we can expect in regards to term limits now that more Christian right candidates are ascending to local, state, and national office.

On a larger scale, of the Christian right's fierce need to control discourse comes from the fact that it has long seen itself as an outsider, a pariah within dominant liberal discourse communities in the United States. In the society at large and within the conservative religious community, institutional discourse is normative, establishing parameters of what can and cannot be said within a given framework; furthermore, these parameters tend to become internalized so that a discourse community establishes what can and cannot be thought. One way of looking at political conflict in the United States today is in terms of a clash between two discourse communities, which is what religious conservatives refer to as a "culture war." From the perspective of Christian fundamentalists, for example, the law denies them religious freedom; social services would intervene in parental control over the child; medicine legitimizes abortion; public education secularizes youth; and the press demonizes the right. In this sense, Christian teleministries and secular conservative talk shows like Rush Limbaugh's offer the satisfaction of providing the Christian right a mediated "home," an alternative public discourse community. In addition, for those who concur, the tidy catch phrases that sum up areas of moral/political agreement now affirm one's membership in a newly established, aspiring power bloc. Furthermore, the older vision of oneself as martyr and the newer vision of oneself as socially empowered become melded when a person keeps these catch phrases alive by publicly uttering them, easily assuming that they bear analytic weight.

In its discursive concerns, the Christian right seems especially obsessed with sexuality. Sexual issues that concern the right include AIDS education and research funding, teen pregnancy, social and personal aspects of birth control, "illegitimacy," pornography, and abortion. Mostly the right seeks to control discourses around sexuality by placing a moral premium on the social fantasy of a healthy family, one which has a father, mother, and children living together under the same roof and never succumbing to divorce.

However, the historical circumstances shaping the family and sexuality have shifted in the last twenty five years and continue to change. To earn enough to support a family or, if middle class, maintain a middle class lifestyle, women, especially mothers, have had to enter the workforce; with many areas of work opening up to women, the structure of the U.S. family has also shifted historically. In terms of sexuality, with the advent of AIDS the social circumstances shaping sexual practice have also changed, showing desire ever more visibly as historically shifting in its expression. Is conservative discourse only catching-up to social change? And can it offer very many people a social alternative?

To give an example of the kind of contradictions the Christian Coalition does not address when it promotes family values, working couples nationwide face difficult issues related to day care. This problem has become a structural feature of contemporary life. Daycare is often called by the Christian right 'social parenting,' which fundamentalists often condemn it as part of the right's larger social agenda of keeping the social welfare system out of the family. However, daycare is not condemned or even mentioned in these activist training tapes, most likely because most of the women in the Christian Coalition will need daycare. To fulfill its fantasy of "mom at home," what the Christian Coalition has instead proposed as Congressional legislation is a huge tax credit for each child, originally up to a joint income of \$200,000, so that families where one parent wants to stay home as a full time homemaker would not be penalized.

The right also uses sexuality to proffer an easy condemnation of groups deemed the Other, which the right wants to make disappear. In the Leadership School tapes the speakers often make in passing easy condemnations of abortion, as well as sometimes scurrilous references to homosexuality. For example, Terry Cooper in discussing opposition research notes how one national legislator was effectively denounced for joining the Health and Education subcommittee, which the opposition within the legislator's constituency relabeled the Fairy Committee since it was responsible for AIDS funding. Yet even in the ranks of activists there are many women who had abortions as well as people who helped a family member or friend get an abortion, or who have a homosexual in their family. As those of us on the other side develop a way to oppose this targeting of the sexually 'sinful' " the accused including people as diverse as teens, welfare mothers, homosexuals, artists, media makers in the entertainment industry, or women seeking abortion " we have to find more points of personal contact, to get ordinary people on the right to admit the many ways that they have an intimate tie to that which they oppose.

Equally important to denounce at every turn is the racism that lies behind the right rhetoric defining sexuality and the family. When conservative legislators seek to deny rights to children born in the United States to undocumented immigrants, the lawmakers implicitly act out of fear, and perhaps also jealousy, that the poor have babies at a faster rate than the middle class, that people of color in the United States have a higher reproductive rate than whites. Terms like "illegitimacy," teenage pregnancy, and welfare refer in a coded way to the presumed illicit sexuality of urban African Americans. [Hacker] Conservative political discourse's reliance on racially-inflected social condemnations of poor, single-parent families indicates that veiled racist discourse is one of the traits that makes the religious conservative movement so effective. In a voice seemingly opposed to racist practices and attitudes, Ralph Reed frequently denounces conservative Christianity's support of slavery and its ongoing role in perpetuating slavery's legacy. [Reed, Politically Incorrect, pp. 235-231] However, many other Christian conservative leaders demonstrate their capacity to contain and use both voices at once, a tactic which proves useful at both the national policy-making and "grassroots" level.

On another level, in its ongoing attacks against the arts and public education, one of the right's easiest victories came when it took a phrase wittily used on the left to criticize

over-zealous ideologues, "political correctness," and turned it into a catch-word to criticize all liberal efforts at social change or even efforts to analyze or publicly discuss issues of injustice. The arts and humanities, especially in the educational sphere, elicit the right's special rage. Again, feeling itself the outsider, the right fears the left's cultural capital in the humanities and the arts and targets it. But it also studies us, especially our phraseology, and then it turns phrases from the left around 180 degrees. It is not a new strategy; the Bakke case in the Supreme Court brought the phrase "reverse discrimination" into common parlance. But this verbal strategy has now become greatly potentiated when so effectively used by a political organization aiming at electoral control.

In the electoral sphere, one of the more recent versions of taking liberal phrasing and turning it to right purposes is the California Civil Rights Initiative, which may appear on the state ballot in 1996. With different phrasing, this initiative had a trial run as Colorado's Amendment Two to the state constitution, which the electorate voted into law in 1992 and which was judged unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1996. The California initiative, learning from the Colorado trial how to phrase itself as an anti-homosexual law, has the following wording:

Neither the state of California nor any of its political subdivisions or agents shall use race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin as a criterion for either discriminating against, or granting preferential treatment to, any individual or group in the operation of the state's system of public employment, public education or public contracting.  
[Peyton]

Christian American, the Christian Coalition's magazine, also available on-line on the internet, introduced this issue for the first time to its readers in April 1995, when it noted, "Already clones of CCRI [California Civil Rights Initiative] are being readied in other states. And there will be an effort to put a national version in the Republican platform of 1996, if not to pass another into federal law even before then." [Peyton]

The California Civil Rights Initiative makes an useful case study of how the Christian Coalition "introduces" a new issue and then builds it into a legislative platform. The move from clever phrasing to lobbying campaigns to writing new law based on that phrasing reveals the way the Christian Coalition represents something new on the political scene. Time and time again we can see how the Coalition leadership has studied left vocabulary and very deliberately, almost ironically, recast it. In this instance, the phrasing of the original Equal Rights Amendment is, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on the basis of sex." The California Equal Rights Initiative uses a parallel syntactical structure. Because of its phrasing, it seems to echo the Equal Rights Amendment's progressive goals when, in fact, the initiative's supporters wish to reverse the effect of equal rights and affirmative action legislation which has been enacted in a widespread way in national, state, and local law.

The Christian Coalition leadership is very aware of the relation of discourse's key role in political organizing, in particular, the relation of discursive struggles to the kind of

political processes that religious conservatives have set in motion. Here Christian American mentions the issue of the California Civil Rights Initiative. It indicates that this is an initiative that probably will become a major part of the Christian right's national platform, even the Republican Party's national platform. In a top-down way, the Coalition news magazine has timed the building of support for a national anti-civil-rights law, now labeled in Orwellian fashion a civil rights law. This planting of the idea reveals a characteristic Christian right discursive strategy, and it indicates the degree to which the chapters are hardly grassroots organizations, since the timing with which they take up national issues seems so well paced out in advance for them.

The Christian Coalition reaps many benefits from the time and money it spends on "framing the issues." Its discursive intervention in shaping what can and cannot be said has already had an impact in the U.S. social sphere. Because the Christian Coalition has created a mechanism, the voter survey, to assess constantly its constituency's emotional and social needs, it can tailor its propaganda to common prejudices. It formulates ways of stating issues that imply a consensus, that imply that these issues are directly related to values everyone shares, especially the need to promote the family. For these reasons, any effective opposition to right wing political moves must analyze the discursive history of a given political issue and trace out how the right's vocabulary and propositions are tied to a larger political agenda in a unique way. As we analyze the larger context behind any right wing discursive move, we also resist our constantly being "framed" by them, too.

### In Conclusion, Some Personal Reflections:

At this point, I would like to consider some of the contradictions I see in the political organizing of the Christian right. I have found it useful to examine the relation of this kind of organizing to other movements with which I am more familiar. Not only has the right studied the progressive social movements of the last three decades, its tendencies also echo things I have experienced in the left and in the women's movement. Ralph Reed studies my world and I study his. The goals and tactics of the Christian Coalition's organizing seem eerily familiar, as do the positions of the single-issue groups that do not want to compromise in order to appeal to the broader electorate. As repugnant as their discourse and goals are, the unwillingness of the 1994 House of Representatives freshmen to compromise on issues such as the budget, because of their sense of moral and political urgency, mirrors my own desire for the purity of an alternative culture and disdain for legislative bargaining, which so often seems to be a process in which the poor, women, and ethnic minorities lose out.

However, a big gap separates Christian right organizing from that in which I have participated. Perhaps the biggest difference lies in our goals in educating the public. On the left and in the women's movement, intellectuals and artists have taken as their main task the attempt to teach others how to analyze social structures and gain knowledge which has an efficacy that persists over time. The Christian right also has a faith in learning about and teaching underlying structures, but its analysis always assumes the "naturalness" of capitalism and gender roles. It teaches the nature of the system but does not investigate the systematic nature of capitalism. In this way, for example, it

exposes the failure of the liberal compromise, that is, the failure of welfare programs to move the underclass out of poverty, but it posits as private charity as the alternative to welfare. It cannot tackle an analysis of capitalism as an institution which needs and perpetuates an underclass. In contrast, left/feminist intellectual work also reflects a conviction that people need to dig below the surface in order to interpret the world around them more accurately, but to us this means understanding and teaching the mechanisms of capitalism, imperialism, racism, and patriarchy. I and my co-workers have put in many hours doing research so as to educate our readership/viewership/students about the processes of mystification operating in the world. In 1971, for example, when I was working on a college underground paper, the editorial staff read Le Monde, airmailed to a university library, to inform our readers about what was going on with the invasion of Cambodia when a U.S. news "blackout" existed there. And in the last thirty years in the world of left/feminist media production and criticism, film/video makers and scholars have seen as their major roles analyzing the ideology of image production and using media production and criticism to make visible the social realities and perspectives of communities ignored by the dominant media. The depth of analysis found in progressive publications is what conservatives cannot provide their constituencies since their goals are limited to taking over the Republican Party and U.S. political power.

There is a purpose to seeking the most in-depth, broadly explanatory, and accurate analysis. In order to change society in a just way, we have to know where it has been and where it might go. As Sara Diamond summarizes the difference between the two cultures,

To be 'radical' means to seize the roots of social problems, to advocate and work for profound change. The Christian Right, on the contrary, supports existing conditions that effectively maintain inequality between rich and poor, white and black, men and women. [Diamond, Wrath, p. 89]

The right's goal is currently to effect moral legislation by electoral means. Yet for them as for us, electoral politics may have a limit. As Christian Coalition activists make the compromises necessary to win and stay in office, they will likely find that their political victories do not cause a right agenda to percolate down throughout the system. As feminists we have seen some aspects of our agenda picked up socially in a widespread way, but more of our goals are never discussed seriously, just discarded. To cite a small example, if women and people of color have progressed in terms of media representation so that they now see their faces on the television screen as news announcers, that is a very minor victory. Such token inclusions have hardly diffused institutional racism and sexism, of which too many people constantly still feel the effects.

In this vein, as I do this research, I ask myself with pressing urgency, "Why is the Christian right so comfortable merging with local and state politics when many of us were never and perhaps still are not willing to define this as our principal social role?" I think it is because of the easy fit between pro-business and pro-family politics, the Christian right's phrasing of political issues, and capitalism itself, particularly on the



national and local level. For women on the right, tied to the ideology of motherhood, schools and peer groups seem dangerous for their children, as do sexual knowledge and sexual activity. Libertarian philosophies of minimal government "interference" and especially minimal taxation seem attractive across religious lines. And a tough-on-crime and tough-on-welfare (coded to signify tough on urban Blacks) approach has been a tactic exploited by both parties. Even though we can see through these political "lines" to their ideological underpinnings and their social consequences, few of the people I work with politically have had enough faith in the "system" to want to devote full time to taking it over, especially not to working full time within the Democratic Party to give it a more progressive cast.

In contrast, in the case of the Christian right, the call to political participation is heavily coded with the rhetoric of Christian duty and the establishing of God's kingdom on earth. For this reason, to give them their founder's imprimatur, a number of these Christian Coalition Leadership School tapes have an introduction by Pat Robertson providing a ultimately theological justification for Christian right activism:

God has endowed us with the authority to govern the world, and with that comes the duty to exercise it. If we are going to be good stewards, we will learn to exercise the precious gift of freedom that God has given to each one of us. Without a well-founded strategy, even the most powerful vision may fail.

In this exhortation the code words "endowed us with the authority to govern" and "be good stewards" would remind fundamentalists that Pat Robertson adheres to the doctrine of post-millenarianism. This tenet of faith holds that the elect shall rule on earth for a thousand years after the coming of Christ. More sophisticated religious right strategists base their social policy arguments less on the tenet of millenarianism but rather argue from natural law or widespread moral consensus around certain issues. As a political organizer, Ralph Reed advises conservative religious activists speaking in public to rephrase their religious concerns into language dealing only with social issues. However, the gap that separates Pat Robertson's millenarian frame of reference from Ralph Reed's frame of reference as a political organizer is not far at all. Reed, Robertson's alter ego in the Christian Coalition, does explicitly reject theocracy, the use of political power to enact God's will on earth, and offers instead a pluralist argument, that conservative Christians just like any other group in this culture have the right to participate actively in the political sphere. Yet for many on the religious right, the theocratic argument is the reason for their political commitment. Disclaimers aside, it is still conservative religious thinking that informs the public policy goals of the religious right.

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